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1965/11/17

TELCON
Goldberg
Ball
11/17/65, 10:45 a.m.

G said he had been talking to Yost. G has a suggestion on how to handle the Severeid article. It seems to G that it's obvious that if any approach was made last year, the conditions of that approach from Hanoi (since it is their condition now when they are weaker) would not have been unconditional or along the framework of the Geneva agreement. B replied that U Thant's didn't contain anything we would not describe as an antecedent condition. If it had taken place, Hanoi would have dug in. Even the press today say it would not have been hopeful then.

G continued that he would be more explicit in terms of saying obviously what they wanted to negotiate on was their settlement which involved recognition of the Viet Cong. This would not have to be said publicly but in terms of background for the press. The explanations up to now have not been adequate. Centered around the posture of negotiations, it is then tied in with significant statement of their condition. B replied that is all true, but it doesn't get anywhere with the press. He mentioned the articles by Kleiman and Reston today.

G said the logical answer to that is when you say what the appraisal of the situation is--that these were not meaningful--you give an appraisal by subsequent events. B said our problem is the SYG's implication of setting up the basis of unconditional discussion in the course of which the four points would have been put forth, but still unconditional so far as getting it started is concerned. G felt he couldn't make a case by saying the discussions were unconditional. B said to the extent any discussions he had with the Russians, there was no discussion of conditions. He only was involved in procedural details of getting their agreement to go to Rangoon if we would go.

G asked if historically they had not in some form stated same conditions they stated later. B replied nothing that could be pinned down. One could say that was always the thrust, but since April they have said there are four points necessary. It would be the only basis so that we are on firm ground. They are now posing material conditions about how the negotiations would have come out. G asked if they had been explicit on recognizing the Viet Cong. B replied no, they didn't start talking that way until after April. At the time it occurred in November, there had been no explicit statement. U Thant thought he had agreement on going to Rangoon. Off-the-record it could be said we are not going to negotiate behind the backs of the SVN. They were a party in interest. It was clear it was to have been secret conversations--not a Geneva-type conference, but a bilateral between Hanoi and ourselves, with the SVN excluded. We have always said we would talk in any grouping. As a practical matter, there is little chance of anything being useful. But this doesn't meet the question, "Why didn't you find out?" It was mutually agreed this was a sticky problem.

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